

editorial opinion

Downtown Authority deserves business backing

Projections, rather than reactions, are what city government should be about.

But it's surprising that when municipal governments do take tentative steps to anticipate and counter future trouble, they face a stone wall of resistance.

Take the case of the Downtown Development Authority. At Monday's public hearing on the proposed ordinance to implement the authority, complaints about possible increased taxes were the major objections of residents and business people to the authority. One diehard pessimist said "it's just not going to work."

With that kind of negativism, it won't. But with some long-range planning from the ground up, we

might see a bright downtown future and a thriving business community. A few years ago, empty buildings and deteriorated structures pocked the central business district. But some hard work by government officials and financial, as well as personal, cooperation by business people got things together and business is doing well.

Sure, parking is a hassle sometimes. But once you park, you can walk around and get a wide variety of tasks accomplished. The Twelve Oaks Mall may give downtown some trouble, however.

LET'S FACE IT, it's mall time in this decade. Walkers are still going to shop downtown and crowd avoiders will too. But downtown needs a

moving force to stay alive when the mall tiger threatens to swallow it up.

That kind of force needs to be generated from business people, which is what the authority is all about. Taxes are a problem for everyone, and there's no argument that small business people have it rough these days.

But the authority would have a majority membership of downtown property owners, not the likeliest group to be eager for tax increases. And the city council's approval of any financing plan is necessary for enactment.

It's especially irritating to hear people complain that they don't want government messing in business affairs. This is the perfect opportunity to

give business people the chance to plan for their own future in more than an advisory capacity.

What won't work is to kill the idea before it's off the ground. City councilmen had the chance to hear residents out this week, but let's hope our elected officials take a hard look at the proposal and opt for some compromises rather than toss it out completely. It may take some courage in an election year to get this proposal through, but it takes some courage to stay alive in any jungle.

With a growing emphasis on conservation and the cost of operating a car, the Twelve Oaks Mall may turn out to be a paper tiger after all. But let's get prepared for any possible onslaught.

LYNN ORR

School enrollment report offers little encouragement

Is the elementary school in your neighborhood being closed? Is enrollment in your school district dwindling, requiring layoffs among teachers? Has the reduced enrollment produced cutbacks in state support for your local school system?

There are very few parents in this area who cannot answer at least one of these questions with a troubled, "Yes."

Just why this is so is contained in a recently published report on Michigan's school enrollment decline, which was prepared for the state department of education by a special task force, including George Garver, superintendent of the Livonia School system, and John C. Raesside, president of the Kalamazoo Union school board.

The report has received very little publicity, mostly because it is long, thorough, and complex. But the facts it sets forth are explosive in their impact on our local school system.

MICHIGAN'S school enrollment has come in waves of population. The big one came with the baby boom peak in 1957, which rolled through the schools as the children grew up. In 1962-63 it hit kindergarten schools; in 1971-72 it passed through upper middle school grades (7-9); it smacked into senior high school grades in 1975-76; and now it has passed through the K-12 school system entirely.

Although there was a small increase in births registered in 1969-70, which will generate a small "wavelet" through the schools, any substantial baby boom in the foreseeable future seems unlikely. Nationwide, the fertility rate has dropped from a post World War II high of 3.8 children per woman in 1957 to a current record low of 1.8.

Since 1945, Michigan's public school enrollment has grown enormously, doubling by 1963-64, and reaching a peak of 2,141,761 pupils in 1971-72. But beginning in 1964-65, statewide enrollment started slipping; up to now, more than 115,000 fewer students are enrolled in the public schools than in the record years.

What does this mean? Based on population projections, we can foresee with a fair degree of accuracy that:

- Michigan's schools in grades 7-12 will lose 20 per cent of their present enrollment from 1975 to 1984, when the schools will be educating nearly 185,000 fewer children than they do today.
- Elementary schools will suffer a similar loss of enrollment over the coming decade, dropping by more than 230,000 pupils.

This is the first time in recent Michigan history that we can predict a substantial drop in school enrollment.

SO, YOU might ask, what does this mean? It means trouble for local school finances, in two ways.

A strange sensation

'To see ourselves as others see us'

A Philadelphia newspaper, to raise funds for a charity, conducted a special showing a few years ago of "The Front Page," where Jack Lemmon plays a beat reporter and Walter Matthau the hard-boiled editor. The movie follows Ben Hecht's play about coverage of a murder trial in the 1920s.

Afterwards, the story goes, the newspaper executives were asked how realistic they considered "The Front Page," and to a man they laughed it off as good entertainment with little relation to real life.

Their wives were asked the same question and found the movie an excellent portrayal of how their husbands make a living.

One immediately thinks of the Robert Burns line—"to see ourselves as others see us."

THE STORY came to mind the other day as I read a term paper for a University of Michigan-Dearborn English class by Barbara Turnbull. Her dad, Jim, runs the press this newspaper is printed on, and Barbara's topic was interviewing.

Her sources were a book called "The Journalistic Interview" and three living, breathing, working newsmen: Margaret Miller, suburban life sections coordinator; Sherry Kahan, reporter in the Livonia office; and myself.

Here, with her kind permission, is how Barbara Turnbull saw us:

"The time factor plays a big role in the (ir) preparation technique. In many instances, they just don't have the time to get as much background information as they want."

"As for the specific questions, what they seem to do is get the basic information about the person and then let him ramble, or else they just talk."

"Each one was interested in an 'angle,' which



First, for each lost pupil, each local school district loses more than \$1,000 in state aid, owing to the way the state aid formula is presently computed. If a district loses 10 pupils, it loses nearly \$11,000—enough to hire one beginning teacher.

Can local districts lay off teachers to cut back on expenses to meet reduced state aid payments? Not really, because the costs of running a school system do not drop proportionately with enrollment.

Which leads to the second problem for local districts: To meet the state aid shortfall, they'll have to close more schools. The report estimates that the overhead costs of keeping one average elementary school open are something more than \$66,000 per year.

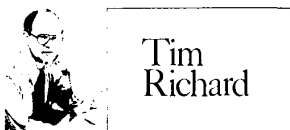
The report concludes that additional state aid to local districts will be needed to offset the impact of declining enrollment, but that even with added state help, other methods will have to be found to offset the increased per pupil cost caused by fewer pupils. "The closing of individual school buildings will become an increasing—and perhaps only—possibility as enrollment continues to decline. . . (but) it is one thing to close a neighborhood elementary school; it may be quite another to close a senior high school."

BUT THAT isn't all. Reduced enrollment will require teacher layoffs—14,600 are estimated by 1981—or drastic increases in teacher/pupil ratios leading to reductions in educational quality.

And because younger teachers will be the first to be laid off, "Michigan's pupils will be taught by teachers who each year are further away from their preparation."

It's a gloomy picture that the report paints, but at least it gives all of us—local school officials, teachers, and parents—a chance to see what looms on the horizon.

Solutions will not be easy, but it's better to know they'll be required than to be surprised.



the book doesn't mention at all. They want to find some way to make the article interesting and make people want to read it."

We blushed a bit at reading how we admitted to lack of time to do background—but it's true.

SHE MADE NOTE of my use of the repetition technique—"when you (interviewer) repeat back to the person what he said."

"This serves two purposes. First, it lets you know whether or not you grasp what the interviewee said. Second, it gives the interviewee confidence that his information is being recorded correctly."

Her teacher was fascinated when Barbara reported: "Usually during the interview, a high point will be reached, probably around the 20-minute mark. After this, it starts going down." In the margin, the instructor asked, "Why?" I don't know why. It just happens that way. The best information comes about 20 minutes after the opening.

Miss Turnbull gave a whole paragraph to a technique I picked up in an anthropology class: "What he does is follow the person in a certain situation, usually his job, and observes what he says and does. He asks only clarifying questions. The natural language of the person is his heard. (giving) the feel of the person's system of values and his 'real' thing."

WHERE HAVE ALL THE STUDENTS GONE?



Unskilled worker may suffer from increase in minimum wage

Unemployment in the nation went back up to 7.1 per cent last month. It had fallen below 7 per cent for two months in a row.

The interesting part is that there are now more heads of households employed than ever before in the history of the nation.

Why then did unemployment go up? As discussed in other columns, it is because more people who haven't been in the job market before want jobs.

Noticeable among these new job seekers are younger women who are now career minded, who in the old days would not have been interested in working; older women who are coming back into the job market after raising their children; and youths entering the job market for the first time, most of whom are unskilled.

Most of the job seekers pushing up the statistics have never before been gainfully employed on a full-time basis.

At the same time that the unemployment rate is going back up, labor unions are pressuring congress and the president to increase the minimum



wage from \$2.30 to \$3.00 an hour.

This week the president compromised by saying he would support an increase to \$2.65. He previously felt that \$2.50 an hour was as high as he would go. This would bring a 40-hour weekly paycheck to \$106 from \$92.

There are very few union members currently earning the minimum wage, so it should be of little concern to them.

THE JOBS that pay the minimum wage are jobs that require the least training or experience. They are the marginal jobs. They are added in good times and dropped in bad times.

As the minimum wage goes up, employers have to weigh whether they need these employees. If checkout boys at a supermarket cost too much, the supermarket hires fewer of them. If the cost gets too high, car washes add extra blowers and cut their employees.

Thus there is a basic conflict. The higher the minimum wage goes, the fewer the opportunities for unskilled labor.

Yet the fewer the jobs, the more unemployment goes up. Every time unemployment rises there is pressure to create new federally subsidized jobs, because the alternative is spending more money on welfare.

The minimum wage was enacted originally to prevent the worker from being exploited. At the time most families in America had only one working member and if he couldn't earn a decent living, the family would have been a burden on society.

Today, all that has changed because of the number of families in which both the members work.

Until there is full employment in this nation we should be doing everything we can to create new jobs. And the creation of new skilled jobs won't solve our unemployment problem because the skilled worker is already working today.

Raising the minimum wage will only decrease the number of unskilled jobs available, deny opportunity to those who want to enter the job market and help maintain a high level of unemployment.

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